

Wirksworth Team Ministry

Exploring Theology 1: 7 February 2007

'Either a little liberal, or else a little conservative'

Note: There's enough material here for a university course. We'll decide how to approach it, and over how many sessions, when we meet. I'm easy – and utterly fascinated.

Why is the C of E so 'colourful'?

- Matthew Parker's consecration, 17 December 1559
- Trends
 - Henry VIII (d 1547)
 - Edward VI (reigning 1547-53)
 - Mary (reigning 1553-58)
 - Elizabeth (reigning 1558-1603) and after
 - Puritan, Caroline, Jacobean, Hanoverian
 - Tractarians, modern
 - High and low

Attitudes to scripture and doctrine

- fundamentalist
- conservative
- liberal
- radical
- evangelical

Eucharistic theology: what happens to bread and wine?

- transubstantiation, consubstantiation
- memorialism, receptionism
- BCP, Elizabeth's statement (see over), the importance of politics

Other issues

- Priest, presbyter, minister
- Relationship with God: personal, confessing, intimate, awe-struck
- Mary ('virgin', not queen): mother, theotokos, immaculate, coredemptrix
- Attitudes to experience: mystical, 'terrestrial', charismatic
- 'catholic', 'protestant', mystical
- Externals in worship
- Catholic: *catholic* occurs frequently in the BCP
- Protestant: a word absent from the BCP

Notes

- The meanings of all these terms can vary with context.
- *Charismatic* does not go exclusively with *evangelical*. There are *charismatic catholics*.

And finally: The Vicar of Bray

Good books

Chadwick O. *The Reformation. Penguin History of the Church, Volume 3*. 1964 and subsequent editions/reprints. Short, paperback, excellent introduction.

MacCullough D. *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*. Allen Lane (Penguin) 2003. Magisterial, and very long.

MacCullough D. *Thomas Cranmer*. Yale University Press 1996. Definitive biography and long.

Elizabeth I

Reputedly spoken when questioned on her beliefs on the Eucharist in Mary's reign:

Christ was the word that spake it. He took the bread and break it;
And what his words did make it, That I believe and take it.

Wirksworth Team Ministry

Exploring Theology 2: 6 February 2007

Faith Schools

At first, I thought there was little theology in this, but it seems I was wrong ...

Great commission Matthew 28:16-20 (Monkhouse translation)

The disciples went to Galilee to the mountain, as Jesus had directed. When they saw Jesus, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came and said to them "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have taught you. Remember, I am with you always.

What is the purpose of faith schools?

- teach observance?
- teach beliefs?
- sign of ethnicity and religion?

Suffer/allow the little children to come to me. ?Force the little children to come to me?

What about the morality of brainwashing into any one religious system?

If one particular faith can have faith schools, then presumably all faiths can. Non-faith schools? Mormons? Jehovah's witnesses? Jedi knights? Satanists?

- What defines a faith?
- To what extent, if at all, should a school of one faith teach or even acknowledge other faiths?

State religion: political power and control. Establishment.

Funding: state? Private? Mixture? Philanthropy?

Tolerance

- The only means to salvation?
- Why should error be tolerated?

Faith and society: separateness

- What if faith beliefs challenge society's values?
- What if faith beliefs challenge modern science/philosophy?

Wirksworth Team Ministry

Exploring Theology 3: 4 April 2007

Stem cells

Stem cells are primitive cells that retain the ability to renew themselves through cell division and can become specialized¹ into a wide range of cell types. The newly fertilized zygote² is the ultimate stem cell: it gives rise to every cell type in the body.

Defining properties

- **Self-renewal:** the ability to go through numerous cycles of cell division while maintaining the unspecialized state.
- **Unlimited potency:** *Potency* specifies the potential to 'specialize' (differentiate) into different cell types.
 - totipotent stem cells can develop into anything.
 - pluripotent stem cells can develop into many things.
 - multipotent stem cells can produce only cells of a closely related family of cells.
 - unipotent cells can produce only one cell type, but can renew themselves.
- **Examples of stem cells**
 - embryonic stem cells
 - umbilical cord blood stem cells
 - adult stem cells

Embryonic stem cells

- Embryonic stem cell lines are derived from the human embryo, about 4 days after fertilization.
- Pluripotent (they can not give rise to placental cells).
- Potential source for tissue replacement after injury or disease.

Adult stem cells

- Adult stem cells are undifferentiated cells found throughout the body that divide to replenish dying cells and regenerate damaged tissues.
- Stem cell treatments
 - Now, for example, bone marrow transplants.
 - In the future, possibly cancer, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries, muscle damage, etc.
 - Already used extensively in research. Is the investigation of stem cells a goal worthy in itself?

Stem cell controversy

- The use of adult stem cells is not particularly controversial, because their production does not require the destruction of an embryo. They can be isolated from a tissue sample obtained from an adult.
- The problem lies with embryonic stem cells, totipotent cells. These require the destruction of a human embryo and/or therapeutic cloning. This is:
 - slippery slope to reproductive cloning;
 - tantamount to the instrumentalization of a human being.
- Some researchers argue that it is necessary to pursue embryonic stem cell research because of significant medical potential, the embryos used for research being only those meant for destruction anyway, such as the products of in vitro fertilisation.
- Cloning is the copying of a group of cells so that the resultant cells are genetically identical to the original group.

WSM070325

¹ The jargon term is *differentiation*: primitive becomes specialized. It can be defined as the process whereby the cells within the developing organism take on their identity needed for future functions within the body. Sometimes a differentiated cell can dedifferentiate back to a more primitive type.

² *Zygote* = product of fertilization, conception. By convention, *embryo* refers to the products of conception up the end of the 8th week of pregnancy; *fetus* from 9 weeks onwards.

What issues does it raise?

Questions

- Is an embryo a human life, or it is not?
- When does human life begin?
- Is 'capable of developing into a human life' equivalent to being a fully human life?
- Cloning: the copying of a group of cells to give genetically identical products. Identical twins? manufacturing people.
- Issues of dignity, legality, intention?
- Payment?
- Role of scientists in making decisions?
- Role of politicians in making decisions?

On what basis are you going to make decisions?

- Ethical systems
 - OT ethics
 - NT ethics
 - Natural Law
 - Virtue ethics
 - Ethics and law
- Individual
- Society (cost, feel-good)
- Delight and desire
- Rights/duties?
- Pastoral

Rowan Williams quotes Fr Herbert McCabe OP as saying that 'ethics is entirely concerned with doing what you want'.

Beauchamp and Childress (authors of one of the medical ethics texts – note: I'm cynical about this)

- *Deductivism* - top-down
- *Inductivism* - bottom-up
- *Coherentism* - which cometh neither from the top nor the bottom. *Reflective equilibrium* is its goal. 'at the same time, we can eliminate the witnesses' stories that do not converge and cannot be made consistent with the main lines of convergence.' That is to say (Stanley's words) 'ignore what you don't like.'

Didache, Chapter 4.

My child, remember night and day him who speaks the word of God to you, and honour him as you do the Lord. For wherever the lordly rule is uttered, there is the Lord. And seek out day by day the faces of the saints, in order that you may rest upon their words. Do not long for division, but rather bring those who contend to peace. Judge righteously, and do not respect persons in reproving for transgressions. You shall not be undecided whether or not it shall be. Be not a stretcher forth of the hands to receive and a drawer of them back to give. If you have anything, through your hands you shall give ransom for your sins. Do not hesitate to give, nor complain when you give; for you shall know who is the good repayer of the hire. Do not turn away from him who is in want; rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are partakers in that which is immortal, how much more in things which are mortal? Do not remove your hand from your son or daughter; rather, teach them the fear of God from their youth. Do not enjoin anything in your bitterness upon your bondman or maidservant, who hope in the same God, lest ever they shall fear not God who is over both; for he comes not to call according to the outward appearance, but to them whom the Spirit has prepared. And you bondmen shall be subject to your masters as to a type of God, in modesty and fear. You shall hate all hypocrisy and everything which is not pleasing to the Lord. Do not in any way forsake the commandments of the Lord; but keep what you have received, neither adding thereto nor taking away therefrom. In the church you shall acknowledge your transgressions, and you shall not come near for your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life.

Wirksworth Team Ministry

Exploring Theology 4: 2 May 2007

End of life issues: abortion, euthanasia, etc

Thou shalt not kill. What does kill mean? Why take this bit of Hebrew Scripture seriously, when (a) they didn't (or did they?), and (b) we ignore so much else of Hebrew Scripture?

Abortion: the premature expulsion of the products of conception (fetus, fetal membranes, placenta) from the uterus.

- Spontaneous: common – nature is profligate. Miscarriage is one of these.
- induced: what the lay press means by abortion.

Abortion law: some landmarks

- 1803 abortion a statutory felony both before and after 'quickening', punishable by death.
- 1837 illegal to 'procure a miscarriage' or provide the means for a woman to 'procure a miscarriage', punishable by life imprisonment.
- 1929 anyone who destroyed a child 'capable of being born alive' was guilty of a crime, unless it was done 'in good faith for the purpose of preserving the life of the mother'. Fetal viability set at 28 weeks.
- 1967 The Abortion Act, making abortion legal under conditions. The ILP Act still stands, setting the legal upper limit for termination at 28 weeks.
- 1991 limit lowered to 24 weeks. The amendments also overrule the fetal viability clause and permit abortion for fetal handicap up until birth. The ILP Act is now irrelevant.
- Current law does not legalise abortions but provides a legal defence for those carrying them out.

Issues raised include:

- Does induced abortion affect the fertilized ovum? Does this matter? What constitutes a person? Ensoulment?
- What about contraception that prevents the fertilized ovum gaining adequate nutrition, such as 'the pill' that prevents implantation? Is this, in effect, abortion?
- 'Where abortion occurs naturally there can be no moral judgement.' (Why not?) Where the abortion is 'procured', then what?
- A Private matter or a community one? "And the King will answer will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt. 24:40)
- An equal right to life?
 - "Christ became human for our sake and an embryo for the sake of all embryos" (Torrance 2000).
 - "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb".
 - ".....a greater risk to the physical or mental health of the woman, or her existing children..."
- Does or should the visible have greater rights than the invisible?
- Mitigating factors: eg Rape? Who is more deserving of compassion?
- Birth defects. Eugenics? What's wrong with eugenics anyway?

Euthanasia and mercy killing

- Many issues are similar to above.
- Whose is your body?
- Do you control it? Should you?
- Who says suffering is bad for you?

Think about this

- *Hebrew Scripture*. Religious aim of creating a 'ritual and ethically holy community where every word, thought and deed is an act of obedience to God.' Community matters.
- *Gospels and Epistles*. On the whole, Christianity focuses less on outer manifestations of purity, and more on interior intention, or spiritual expression. Concern for community is taken up. In Gospels, fidelity to God and neighbour take pride of place. Jesus excludes nobody.
- *Creative fidelity* to Christ's teaching is what we need in biomedical ethics. And since Christian teaching is that Our Lord became fully human, this means creative fidelity to authentic humanness as it is in the world. Incarnational ethics (Stanley's term).

Wirksworth Team Ministry
Exploring Theology 5: 6 June 2007

Homosexuality (and the authority of scripture)

What does Hebrew Scripture say?

- Genesis 19
- Ezekiel 16
- Judges 19
- Leviticus 18
- Song of Songs
 - eros
 - ecstasy, ritual

What do the Gospels say? What does Jesus say?

What does Paul say?

- Paul: Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:10
- The problem of translation
 - arsenokoitai
 - malakoi
- To whom is he writing, and what culture are his listeners part of?

What is the Christian message?

- Are heterosexual Christians more privileged than homosexual Christians?
- Why does it matter what people do with their genitals if no-one else is exploited?
- 'The church should keep its nose out of people's private lives' (a rough quote from George Monbiot). What constitutes private? Is anything OK so long as people engage willingly and no-one is exploited?

To what extent is all single-sex activity a sublimation of natural same-sex bonding rituals? What about gropings in the rugby scrum?

What about art and beauty?

What is a homosexual relationship?

- Is orgasm necessary? What is an orgasm anyway?
- Is it natural?
- Is it a lifestyle choice?
- Is it a manifestation of biological inclination?
- Is it a response to parental influence?

What about the 'sin of Onan' (Genesis 38)? Why 'sin'? Does this mean that premature ejaculation is sinful? Or coitus interruptus? Or masturbation? What about women?

If homosexuality is a disorder, then what about Down's syndrome, or club foot, or albinism, or being born in the wrong town? By what standards are we to set limits?

Is there a difference between having an inclination and acting on that inclination?

If we use Holy Scripture, why are we selective about it?

Should ministers of religion be judged differently from other humans?

Why should Christianity make such a fuss about what in other religions is hardly noted?

The (arch)bishops have said that this is a matter for prayer and reflection. What does this imply?